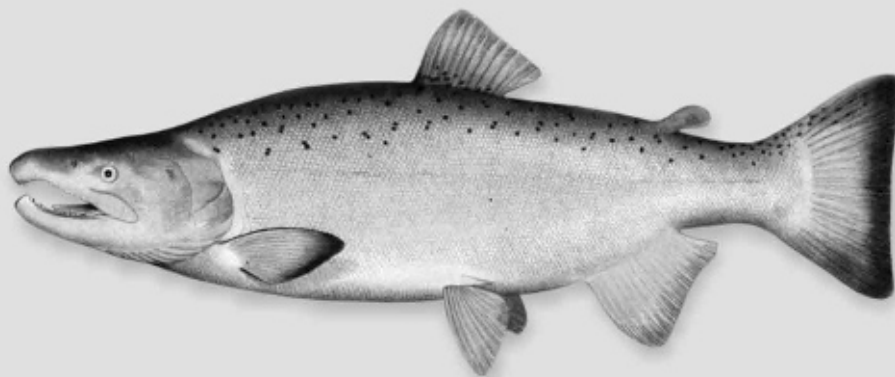
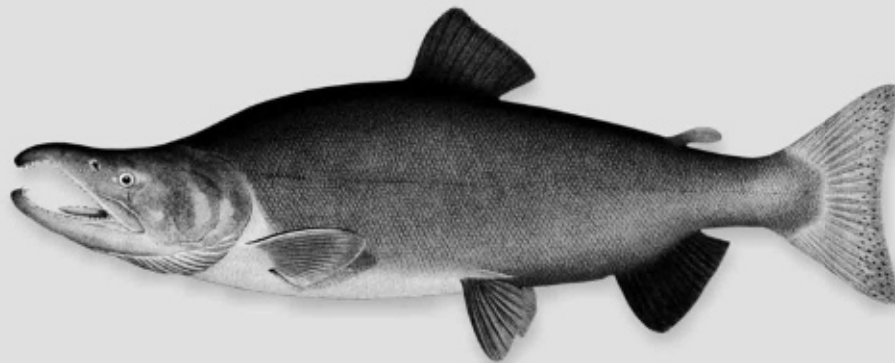
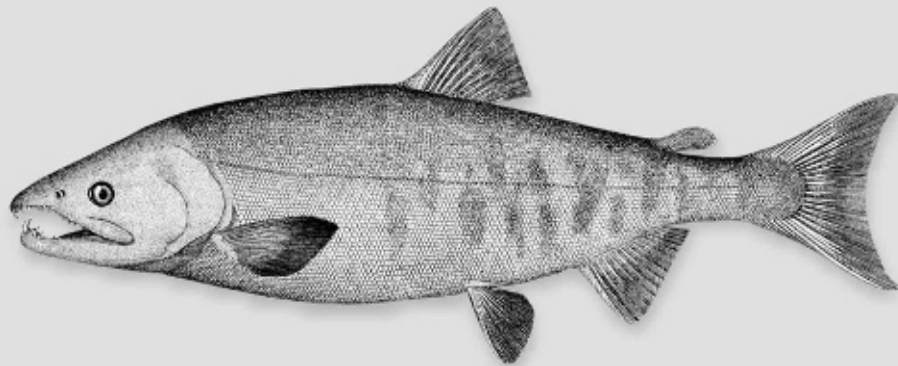


Fish Report No. 1:

Commercial Fishermen—Pelican Cold Storage—King Salmon—Halibut—
Dungeness Crab—Sharks—Gustavus Homesteader Fishermen—Harbor
Seals—Shrimp



Commercial Fishermen

The *Economist* magazine characterized commercial fishermen as the “last race of hunter-gatherers.”¹⁹⁹ Often far from home, they work a hard, dangerous, and sometimes lonely job in which little is certain: weather can change unpredictably for the worse and stay bad for days. As well, machinery can fail at critical times, markets can be fickle, fish stocks can fluctuate dramatically, and the regulations that govern individual fisheries can be modified for a host of reasons. Local knowledge—where and when to fish, where to anchor, the effect of tidal currents on sea conditions, and a host of other information—is very important and accumulated mostly through experience.

Kevin Schade, a Juneau-based power troller who fished alone, illustrated the temperament and courage it takes to be a fisherman. He approached me late one fall and said that he planned to fish in Glacier Bay and was looking for a market for the king salmon he might catch. By that time almost everyone else had quit fishing. With little other fishing effort in the region, any fish he caught would be easy to sell. But Schade was taking a gamble. It was dangerous enough to be in Glacier Bay late in the season, but it was more so to be alone. Even the smallest mishap could prove fatal. The weather could quickly turn dangerous, with gale or even storm-force winds and temperatures that could drop to below zero. Another issue was his boat: though decently-maintained, the double-ender *Maria* was of wood and very old. And it was one of the few power trollers still powered by a gasoline engine. As well as being less efficient than diesel engines, gasoline engines are less reliable and considerably more prone to fires. In the best of conditions, help would be several hours away, providing he could contact someone. And the days were short and getting shorter. Nevertheless, Schade was careful, perhaps a little lucky, and did pretty well. There were a few fish still around and we looked forward to his radio call every five days or so asking us to meet him at the dock at Bartlett Cove. We appreciated getting the fish almost as much as we appreciated knowing that Schade was safe. For him the whole venture was nothing special, just what fishermen do.

Commercial fishing is not just an occupation, it's a way of life. As the Scottish novelist

and poet Walter Scott said: “It's not fish you're buying. It's men's lives.”

Pelican Cold Storage

During the 1930s, fish buyer Kalle Raatikainen was based in Sitka and owned the tender *Pelican* as well as several buying scows. Raatikainen bought troll-caught salmon on the grounds as far north as Deer Harbor, on Yakobi Island. The trolling fleet had been gradually moving northward, and he conceived the idea of building a cold storage (freezer plant) in the area. Raatikainen turned his idea into a plan. He chose a site along Lisianski Inlet on Chichagof Island for the future cold storage because of its hydroelectric potential and its proximity to the fishing grounds. The location was named Pelican, after Raatikainen's boat, and the new company would be called Pelican Cold Storage (see Figure 17).

In August 1939, Raatikainen traveled to Seattle, where he ordered construction materials for his project, much of it from the Weyerhaeuser Timber Co. The following month, the material was shipped north on the Alaska Transport Co.'s steam schooner, *Tongass*. Alaska Transport was owned by Norton Clapp, a Tacoma, Washington businessman whose family also owned a considerable interest in Weyerhaeuser. Upon the vessel's arrival at Pelican, Raatikainen was presented with a bill for the materials. The bill totaled in the thousands of dollars, and the vessel's master was instructed not to unload any of the cargo until it was paid. Raatikainen could not pay the bill: his liquid capital at the time was only several hundred dollars. The situation was complicated by the fact that the *Tongass* was scheduled to pick up a load of frozen fish and canned salmon for transport to Puget Sound, but could not do so until the Raatikainen's cargo was unloaded. Arrangements for getting the *Tongass* unloaded and on its way were negotiated via radio, and when the vessel left Pelican, Raatikainen was in debt to Norton Clapp. Clapp later exchanged the debt for \$50,000 in Pelican Cold Storage stock.²⁰⁰ The Clapp family eventually came to own Pelican Cold Storage.

The construction of Pelican Cold Storage was shrouded in wartime secrecy, and may have received some priority for labor and materials as a potential producer of food for the war effort.¹¹ The company did contribute to

¹¹ As “Fishery Coordinator” during World War II, Harold Ickes, who was also Secretary of the Interior, consolidated salmon canning operations in Alaska to make them less demanding of labor and material.



**Top
Fishermen
Choose**

PELICAN

Best prices for salmon, halibut, crab, and herring.

We are a full service port for the fishermen
of the North Pacific featuring bait, ice, fuel,
hardware, groceries, and
quick turnaround.



PELICAN COLD STORAGE COMPANY
Pelican, Alaska 99832
Telephone: (907) 735-4111
Radio: KLT 99 (4136.3 SSB, 2512.0 AME)

“CLOSEST TO THE FISH”

Figure 17: Pelican Cold Storage advertisement in *Fisherman's News*, 1971.

the war effort by providing refrigerated storage for the Army base at Excursion Inlet. Preliminary fish processing operations began in 1943, and the plant was completed in 1944. Pelican Cold Storage was capable of freezing 100,000 pounds of fish per day, with a frozen storage capacity of 4,000,000 pounds. In 1944 the community built around the cold storage was incorporated as a first-class city, complete with post office.²⁰¹ Production at Pelican Cold Storage in 1945 was some seven million pounds.²⁰²

Several years later Pelican Cold Storage expanded its operations to include the processing of Dungeness crab through a merger

with a small company in Hoonah owned by Prosper Ganty. Ganty was a businessman from Sitka who shortly after World War II purchased Bill Smith's Coastal Glacier Seafoods Dungeness crab canning plant in Hoonah.²⁰³ He soon renamed the operation the P. S. Ganty Co. In late 1948 or early 1949, the company merged into Pelican Cold Storage. Ganty had known Norton Clapp since World War II, when they served together at the army facility at Excursion Inlet. Clapp had great faith in Ganty's knowledge of the commercial fishing industry in Southeast Alaska, and made him president of the company.²⁰⁴ Ganty managed Pelican Cold Storage's operations until he

was succeeded by Jim Ferguson in 1969.²⁰⁵ Pelican Cold Storage would become for many years the principal buyer of Dungeness crab from Glacier Bay. As well, the company would purchase considerable quantities of halibut and Tanner crab.

The first vessel ever built at Pelican was 57 feet long and designed to fish halibut. It was completed in 1949 and christened, perhaps auspiciously, *Glacier Bay*.²⁰⁶

King Salmon

Assistant Chief Ranger Duane Jacobs reported in 1950 that salmon fishing in Glacier Bay proper was “mostly confined to trolling.”²⁰⁷ The following year Supervisory Park Ranger Oscar Dick, who spent some time at Glacier Bay, reported that “to the best of my knowledge,” there was no salmon fishing done in Glacier Bay proper.²⁰⁸

In 1958, John Hinchman, of Hoonah, bought the seine boat *Yankee*. Before and after the seine season (sometimes as late as Thanksgiving), Hinchman would transport about eight or nine skiffs, some of which were equipped with outboard motors, into Glacier Bay to troll for king salmon. Some of the skiffs were placed on deck while others were towed. Favored fishing locations were Fingers Bay, Garforth Island, Russell Island, Tidal Inlet, and Queen Inlet. As with James Martin’s operation during the late 1930s, the seine boat would be used as a base of operations where the fishermen ate, slept, and kept their fish. Each fisherman had a bin or tote in which to ice his fish. As with earlier efforts, the ice came from icebergs.²⁰⁹

There were several other seine boats that were involved in similar operations. Floyd Peterson, of Hoonah, recalled making several trips to Glacier Bay in the dead of winter with Frank Wright (also of Hoonah) on the *Mary Joanne*. Leo Houston’s *Ocean Queen* also supported a small hand troll operation in Glacier Bay.²¹⁰

Halibut

Though no quantitative data was available to back up the assertion, in 1951 the NPS reported that the waters around Willoughby Island were “fished extensively” for halibut.²¹¹ The agency reported that an “excellent catch” of halibut was taken from Glacier Bay during the 1952 season. Most of the fishing was done between the mouth of Glacier Bay and the

north end of Willoughby Island by small vessels with crews of three or four men.²¹²

Bruce Black, an NPS ranger stationed at Sitka who patrolled Glacier Bay during the summers of 1953 thru 1955, recalled a vessel fishing halibut in 1953. He did not remember the name of the vessel, but said it was not from Hoonah. The following year the same vessel was anchored at Bartlett Cove several days before the halibut season was to open. The morning before the opening, Glacier Bay was cloaked in dense fog. Apparently the vessel was getting an early start on the season, because from his cabin on Lagoon Island Black could clearly hear halibut gear being set. The fog, however, prevented him from investigating further. Black had no law enforcement training and was unsure of the statutes, but, given the opportunity, said he would have talked to the fishermen and recorded the incident.²¹³

In the 1960s, nylon began replacing hemp and cotton for groundline and gangions. Nylon is stronger and, unlike its natural counterparts, does not rot, and so requires less maintenance. Of great importance also was the introduction of snap-on gear. With snap-on gear, rather than the gangion being permanently spliced into the groundline, it was fastened with a metal clip, usually of galvanized or stainless steel. This allowed the gangion, with its baited hook, to be “snapped” onto the groundline as it was being paid out, and snapped off as the gear was retrieved. Though usually less efficient than traditional “stuck” gear in the hands of experienced halibut fishermen, snap-on gear made it easier for vessels designed for other fisheries to participate in the halibut fishery. This was especially true of gillnet boats, which were fitted with a large hydraulically-driven drum to hold the net. The net could easily be replaced with groundline for fishing halibut.

The result of these improvements in longlining technology was to facilitate the entry of additional fishermen into the halibut fishery. Crowding on the grounds became an issue, particularly when the price of halibut began trending upwards in the 1970s. During the 1970s, the International Pacific Halibut Commission adopted a regulation that prohibited commercial fishermen from keeping halibut less than 32 inches long. The live weight of a 32-inch fish would be about 14 pounds. Around 1982, the traditional “J” hooks used in the halibut fishery were replaced by circle hooks (see Figure 18:

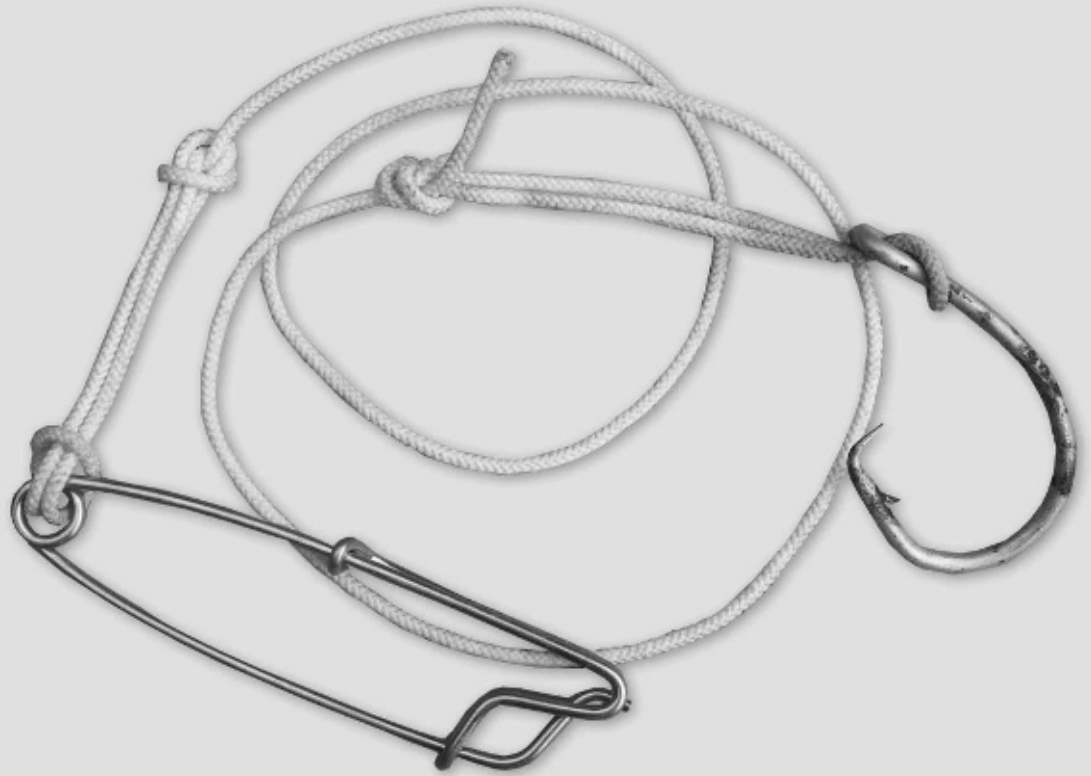


Figure 18: Modern halibut circle hook. Compare with figure 2. (courtesy Bill Eichenlaub)

compare with Figure 2), which, despite their appearance, are far more efficient at hooking and retaining halibut. The use of circle hooks offers a conservation benefit as well: since the hooks almost uniformly hook halibut by the lip, undersize fish can usually be returned to the water with no mortality.

The NPS kept some records of the commercial halibut effort in Glacier Bay during the 1960s.

- 1962: “Two or three commercial halibut boats operated in monument waters throughout the season;”²¹⁴
- 1963: “two or three [halibut] boats fished Glacier Bay proper this season;”²¹⁵
- 1965: “At least six boats regularly fished in Glacier Bay last summer. Catches were reported as fair to good throughout the season.”²¹⁶

NPS ranger Greg Streveler recalled the vessels *Charbus* (from Juneau), *Sophia* (from Wrangell), and *Lenora Jane* (from Hoonah) to have fished halibut regularly in Glacier Bay during the late 1960s.²¹⁷ He recalled that the three vessels—especially the *Sophia*—were very well-kept.²¹⁸ Ranger Russ Cahill wrote of a “thriving” halibut fishery in Glacier Bay in 1970, but later said that most of the vessels fishing were old and in poor repair.²¹⁹

Dungeness Crab

During the 1950 season, one vessel, the *Wanita*, which was home-ported at Petersburg, prospected for Dungeness crab in Glacier Bay during August.²²⁰

In his 1951 patrols of Glacier Bay, Ranger Oscar Dick encountered two vessels that were fishing for Dungeness crab. One vessel fished all summer, the other started in mid-September. Dick estimated the catch for each vessel to be 75 dozen crab (about 2,100 pounds) per week.²²¹ When inspected by Dick, both vessels were using seal meat as crab bait. Dick did not arrest the men, but informed them that the use of seal meat for crab bait was illegal and issued them a “stern warning,” which apparently caused something of an uproar in Hoonah.²²²

In the spring of 1952, the Fish and Wildlife Service extended the Dungeness crab season in the Icy Strait District—which included Glacier Bay—to year-round.²²³ There seems to have been little, if any, commercial fishing for Dungeness crab in Glacier Bay during the remainder of the 1950s.

Sharks

Shark liver is rich in Vitamin A and contains other substances that are thought to have medicinal properties. During World War II, a market developed for the livers of sharks, skates and halibut. Halibut livers were saved in the

course of normal halibut fishing, and a small, though generally not very lucrative, fishery that targeted sharks for their livers developed in Southeast Alaska. The sharks fished were known to the fishermen as “mud sharks,” and attained a length of up to twenty feet. They were likely Pacific sleeper sharks (*Somniosus pacificus*), and were caught in deep water with longline gear or handlines. Reminiscent of Ernest Hemmingway’s *Old Man and the Sea*, handliners sometimes fished from skiffs. They used salmon for bait and towed caught sharks to the beach to remove the liver, which floats. The liver was the only part of the shark that was utilized. Livers were kept in square five-gallon metal cans that were provided by buyers, and generally fetched about \$0.25 per pound. The liver of one particularly large shark was said to have nearly filled a 55-gallon drum. In the early 1950s, one vessel, a longliner from Juneau, reportedly fished sharks in Glacier Bay “for something to do” after the halibut season.²²⁴ The shark liver fishery in Southeast Alaska collapsed in the 1950s when the Norwegians began marketing cod liver oil.

A Few Gustavus Homesteaders Go Fishing

The first homesteaders arrived at Gustavus (then known as Strawberry Point) in 1914. A total of 14 homesteads were patented before homesteading was closed in 1966. The very resourceful homesteaders at Gustavus did whatever they could to make a living, but they tended to look to the land rather than the sea. They farmed, raised cattle, logged, cut lumber, mined gold, worked for the government, worked seasonal construction jobs and in canneries. A few began to fish commercially in the 1930s and 1940s, but only one, Fred Matson (whose wife taught school) made something of a career of it. To a man, the Gustavus fishermen were trollers who focused their efforts on coho salmon in Icy Strait and Cross Sound. The author, who personally knew many of them and even fished with Bert Parker (admired as a “master coho-catcher”), never heard any mention of their fishing in Glacier Bay.

Harbor Seals

Glacier Bay is home to thousands of harbor seals (*Phoca vitulina*), which concentrate on icebergs along glacier fronts during the springtime pupping season. Hoonah Natives

hunted seals for food and hides in Glacier Bay since before John Muir’s time.

Seals are predators on salmon, and were for many years unfairly blamed for poor salmon runs. To increase the number of salmon by reducing the number of seals, the Alaska’s Territorial Legislature in 1931 passed legislation that placed a \$2 bounty on seals.²²⁵ As well as reducing the seal population, the bounty infused some much-needed cash in rural Alaska. The bounty had no discernible effect on salmon runs.

No hunting of any sort was permitted in Glacier Bay N.M. This was a hard pill to swallow for the Hoonah Natives. In 1937 some 155 residents of Hoonah and nearby areas petitioned Anthony Dimond, Alaska’s non-voting delegate to Congress, to have Glacier Bay N.M. opened to hunting seals.²²⁶ In the fall of 1939 the NPS reached an agreement with the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) to allow Hoonah Natives to hunt seals to help alleviate a wartime food shortage. The exception was formalized in a December 18, 1946 agreement between the NPS and BIA.²²⁷

Seals were valuable for the bounty, for their hides, as a traditional food in Hoonah, and also for crab bait. Both vessels reported to be fishing Dungeness crab in Glacier Bay in 1951 (as noted above) were using seals as bait.²²⁸ Seal meat was even used by the FWS to bait shrimp pots during exploratory fishing in Glacier Bay in 1966.²²⁹

The seal hunting issue became more urgent in 1966, when a scheduled tour boat, the *Sea Crest*, began operating out of Bartlett Cove. The boat’s destination in those years was Muir Inlet. As well as staggering views of mountains and glacier and icebergs, tourists expected to see wildlife in its element. They usually saw at least some seals reposing on icebergs, but they sometimes also encountered skinned seal carcasses, sometimes hundreds of them, rotting on the beaches—not what one would expect to see in an area managed by the NPS. The seals had been shot for their bounty and hides. As well as being objectionable to tourists, NPS officials considered hunting a real threat to the seal population and wanted to end it. In contrast to seal hunting, the effect of commercial fishermen on fish populations in Glacier Bay was thought to be innocuous.²³⁰

Because of pressure brought by politicians and Hoonah Natives, the NPS was unable to end the hunting of seals in Glacier Bay until

1974. The issue was at times “red hot” in Hoonah, and this decreased the NPS’s ability to press its agenda on other issues, such as curtailing or ending commercial fishing.²³¹

Shrimp

Five species of shrimp of commercial value inhabit Glacier Bay: pink (*Pandalus borealis*), humpy (*Pandalus goniurus*), sidestripe (*Pandalopsis dispar*), coonstripe (*Pandalus hypsinotis*), and spot (*Pandalus platyceros*). These shrimp usually spawn in the fall, with the female—depending upon her size—carrying several hundred to 4,000 eggs until they hatch in the spring. Shrimp are opportunistic bottom feeders that eat a wide variety of live and dead organisms, including diatoms and algae. Pink and humpy shrimp are the smallest of the five Glacier Bay species, and are usually marketed as “cocktail” or “salad” shrimp.²³²

There seems to be no record of commercial shrimp fishing in Glacier Bay prior to the 1960s. The first effort to explore Glacier Bay for shrimp, however, took place in 1952. Part of the mission of the Department of the Interior’s Fish and Wildlife Service was to explore areas for their commercial fishery potential. To that end, the FWS vessel *John N. Cobb* spent part of 1951 prospecting Southeast Alaska for shrimp. The vessel returned to prospect for two additional months in 1952, a substantial portion of which was spent in Glacier Bay.

A small (20-foot) beam trawl, as well as several styles of shrimp pots, were used in the explorations. A beam trawl is a type of bottom trawl in which the mouth of the cone-shaped net is held spread apart horizontally by a long wooden beam. The vertical opening is maintained by a horseshoe-shaped steel frame on each side of the net. As the trawl is towed at a speed of 2.5 to 3 knots, a steel chain stretched below the beam “tickles” the ocean bottom to make shrimp “jump” vertically, to be caught in the trailing net. Beam trawls are more suitable for use over an uneven ocean bottom than the standard otter trawl, which utilizes a hydrodynamic design incorporating wing-like “doors” to keep the net spread. Drag times can range from about thirty minutes to two hours, depending on the bottom characteristics and catch. In Southeast Alaska, beam trawls are used to target pink, sidestripe, and coonstripe shrimp.

Shrimp pots are considerably smaller and lighter than Dungeness crab pots but function similarly. The usually rectangular pots have

a steel frame covered with synthetic mesh. Shrimp gain entry into the pot through a pair of funnel-like tunnels. Shrimp pots are usually baited with herring and fished in strings of perhaps ten pots. Current regulations require a biodegradable escape mechanism to be installed on each pot to prevent “ghost” fishing by lost or abandoned gear. Pot shrimpers in Southeast Alaska target spot shrimp (the North Pacific’s largest) and coonstripes.

Of the areas investigated during the 1952 trip, the most promising indications of shrimp in commercial quantities were found in Glacier Bay. The catch was so encouraging that the *John N. Cobb* twice prolonged its prospecting efforts in the bay. The best catches, though not outstanding by industry standards, were made in the vicinity of Sturgess and Seebree Islands, where drags with the beam trawl yielded catches of up to 330 pounds per hour of mixed pink and sidestripe shrimp.²³³ Similar catches were made as well in Muir, Queen, Hugh Miller and Rendu inlets. Based on the catches, C. Howard Baltzo, FWS assistant regional director, speculated that an expansion of the shellfish industry might be in the offing, and that the establishment of a shrimp cannery at Glacier Bay appeared feasible.²³⁴ This was followed by what the NPS termed “rosy speculation” by the fishing industry over the possibility of Glacier Bay becoming a great shrimping center.²³⁵ The alarm on the part of the NPS was palpable. The only private property in Glacier Bay was the old Carl Swanson fox farm on Strawberry Island. To forestall the establishment of a commercial enterprise, Ben Miller, superintendent of Sitka N.M. and Glacier Bay N.M., suggested steps be taken to purchase the property.²³⁶ It was not necessary to do so. There was no real interest in establishing a shrimp processing plant in Glacier Bay, and the Swanson fox farm was not really private land, but a site leased from the Forest Service before Glacier Bay N.M. was expanded. It eventually reverted back to the government.

For its part, the FWS agreed with the NPS policy of keeping commercial development out of Glacier Bay N.M.²³⁷ Based on the previous year’s discovery by the *John N. Cobb* of commercial quantities of shrimp at Idaho Inlet (on the north shore of Chichagof Island), the Icy Straits Salmon Co. at Hoonah had begun canning shrimp.²³⁸

Despite the apparent presence of commercial quantities of shrimp, Glacier Bay received

little attention from shrimp fishermen. One NPS report of shrimp fishing in Glacier Bay was in March 1959, when one vessel operated in Bartlett Cove for four days.²³⁹ Late in 1966 the FWS sent the research vessel *John R. Manning* to Ernest Sound and Icy Strait in Southeast Alaska to prospect for spot and coonstripe shrimp, and to test a number of shrimp pot designs. In Glacier Bay pots were set in Bartlett Cove, Geike Inlet, Hugh Miller Inlet, Tidal Inlet and North and South Sandy coves as well as in the bay itself. None of the areas yielded commercially significant catches.²⁴⁰

In 1972 the NPS reported that only two vessels in the past five years had fished in waters proposed for wilderness. Both vessels had fished briefly in Hugh Miller Inlet in 1971, and produced what the NPS termed “profitable catches” of coonstripe shrimp. The NPS was “virtually certain that catches comprised but a minor amount of each boat’s annual income.”²⁴¹

In the late 1970s, two Gustavus residents, Lynne Jensen and Phil Wyman, did some commercial shrimp fishing from a skiff. Jensen recalled her crew share for the season as being \$100.²⁴² Also, the author recalls seeing a vessel that appeared to be trawling for shrimp near Seebree Island around 1979.

Shrimp are a prey species for the endangered humpback whale. In 1980, under authority of the NPS Organic Act and citing the Endangered Species Act of 1973, the NPS closed Glacier Bay to commercial shrimp fishing.

